

The Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Supports Advisory Group



Report & Recommendations



***Presented to the Iowa General Assembly and
Governor Thomas J. Vilsack
January 2004***

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Introduction

Iowa has been recognized as being a great place to live and raise children, however, more than 50 percent of Iowa's children are growing up without both a mother and father in their home.

In the fall of 2003, the Director of the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) formed The Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Supports Advisory Group to look at fatherhood, marriage and family supports and provide direction for potential recommendations should federal funds become available to support programs in these areas.

We asked Iowans across the state questions that government does not normally ask. We asked for Iowans' thoughts, opinions, attitudes, desires, and expectations for children and families in Iowa. We asked about fathers and mothers, about marriage and living together and what supports families need to be strong.

We spoke with Iowans from various ethnic and racial, educational and economic households. We questioned fathers and a mother, grandparents, married and singles, young and old, employed and unemployed, victims of domestic violence and incarcerated individuals.

The response was clear - the future of our children is dependent on the family. Strong families make a strong community and state. This report conveys Iowans' message to government, business, religious organizations, and our communities and to our families.

Iowa is only as strong as our families.

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The Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Supports Advisory Group

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Why Focus on Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Supports?

Iowans believe children are our most important assets. We heard that Iowans want safer neighborhoods, better jobs, stronger faith communities, and more opportunities for the future.

Many people believe that since the 1960's, the family structure has been altered, because divorce has increased, single parenting and co-habitation has become more common and accepted, the number of out-of-wedlock pregnancies have increased and there has been a decrease in the number of children growing up in a two-parent household.

The reality is - family stability has become fragmented and uncertain with over 50 percent of Iowa children growing up with only one parent in their home. Nearly 29 percent of all babies born in 2001 were born to unmarried mothers and in that same year, 5,162 divorces left children in a fragmented family.

Our neighborhoods and schools have become dangerous places. There are more poor Iowa families with children at higher risk of not being successful adults. Drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, and family violence impact many families.

Research has shown that children who grow up without the benefit of both parents in their lives are more likely to get into trouble, be expelled from school, use drugs, and engage in sexual activity at younger ages, and girls are twice as likely to get pregnant out of wedlock. Children with only one parent in their home are at much greater risk of being born with low birth rates, having poor physical health, and experiencing poverty and abuse. (See Appendix F.)

These changes impacting family structure and communities challenge government to become more responsive. We value and respect the family. But when a child or family is in immediate danger or crisis, government is directed to intervene.

Welfare reform has recognized the importance of marriage and two-parent families for children by including supports to families. Iowa has required young parents on welfare to attend parenting classes and targeted pilot projects to increase children's outcomes by assisting both mothers and fathers to co-parent their children when the parents are no longer living together.

There has been a movement to encourage government at both the state and federal level to promote successful marriage, supportive family and responsible fatherhood and to include community-based and faith-based organizations as part of the solution.

In March 2001, the Iowa Governor's Task Force for Responsible Fatherhood was formed to identify best practices; identify obstacles that impede or prevent the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children; raise public awareness of the consequences of the absence of the father; and make recommendations for policy and practice that sustain and re-engage fathers in their children's lives. The Task Force issued its report in January 2002.

During the 2003 legislative session, the General Assembly directed DHS to gather more information on how Iowans felt. DHS formed The Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Supports Advisory Group (see Appendix A) to look at fatherhood, marriage and family supports and provide information and potential recommendations should federal funds become available.

Addressing the Challenge

We believe elected officials want to know the needs and wishes of citizens. This is why DHS decided to go directly to Iowans and ask them about their opinions on marriage, fatherhood and family formation.

DHS solicited proposals from qualified service providers and on September 8, 2003, selected Crowe Chizek and Company LLC, to provide facilitation to an advisory group and to survey Iowans. Crowe Chizek also facilitated the Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Supports Advisory Group in the prioritization and analysis of findings obtained from citizens.

The advisory group met for the first time on September 30, 2003, and adopted the name of Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Supports Advisory Group. The members came from diverse backgrounds, representing state government, education, business, domestic violence advocates, adolescent pregnancy prevention, parents, current and past legislators, and faith based communities. Some had formerly served as members of the Governor's Task Force for Responsible Fatherhood with others participating in their first state government task group. Although they brought many viewpoints to the table, they all agreed on the importance of safe and stable families for children.

Focusing on better outcomes for children, the Advisory Group refined a list of questions initially prepared by DHS and Crowe Chizek for use with focus groups (See Appendix C). The Advisory Group determined who to survey and where to hold the focus groups. The 25 focus groups were held during the month of October. The facilitator drove over 3,269 miles through 68 Iowa counties. More than 250 individuals answered the survey questions (See Appendices D and E).

During each of the 25 focus groups (See Appendix B) specific themes became prevalent. Virtually every group emphasized personal accountability and responsibility for the health of the family. Regardless of geography, race or age, personal responsibility permeated the discussions.

As the groups talked about what's best for families, another major theme identified was the abuse and distribution of methamphetamine. Six focus groups referred to their community as the "Meth Capital of Iowa." Participants made dozens of comments about how this drug is not just relegated to inner cities; rather it has found a home in Iowa's rural areas and is destroying the family fabric for thousands of Iowans. Many people mentioned the need to aggressively pursue those who deal in illegal drugs, but also to aggressively treat those who are addicted.

Other major themes included the importance of fathers as a role model regardless of whether they are in the home or not; providing a safe, stable, secure and loving environment for children; and parents should love and respect each other. Other issues that were frequently discussed included the importance of faith, domestic violence concerns, and the importance of grandparents and extended family.

During the focus groups, Iowans were asked – how do you define a family? This question generated a broad discussion and responses included "a mother, father and children," "two people married, with or without children," "people living together in a household," or "any unit that calls itself a family." In general, the focus group participants described "family" as a group

of individuals committed to creating a safe, loving and nurturing environment for each other. Throughout the discussions on family, group participants noted the importance of marriage, commitment, mutual love and support, extended family, and providing a safe and nurturing environment for children.

After the focus groups were completed, the Advisory Group met on November 13, and December 8, to review the findings and develop this report. There was an agreement that children are the responsibility of parents and that to help parents in their relationships was to help families secure better outcomes for their children. The Advisory Group looked at the different stages of a romantic relationship and asked two specific questions - What's needed to support families? and Who can provide that support? The recommendations were then developed and described for those who nurture, serve, and influence children.

Guiding Principles

The Advisory Group agreed on the following issues, which they established as guiding principles:

- References to mothers, fathers and/or parent(s) mean both biological and adoptive.
- The definition of responsible parenthood includes fulfillment of all financial obligations.
- There needs to be respect and sensitivity for Iowa's diverse populations and cultural values.
- Joint counseling for troubled relationships while important does not supercede the safety needs of individuals who are victims of domestic violence.
- In order to secure better outcomes for children, family support services should exist for all family structures when children are in the home. This would include those of same sex relationships that include children in the home.
- If federal dollars become available in the areas of fatherhood, marriage and family support, the State of Iowa should pursue those dollars to the extent that funding is consistent and respectful of values and needs of Iowans.

Recommendations

The Advisory Group recognized the importance of the family and the need for the family to provide a safe, loving and stable environment. The responses from the focus group participants reinforced the overall importance of family. A strong family is built on healthy relationships among all the members of that family and others. The following recommendations were developed within the context of relationships and what's best for children.

1. Lift Up the Importance of the Family

The future of our children depends on the family. Iowans have long supported education, economic development, health, and support services for individuals in the family. What is often not recognized is the importance of working with the whole family rather than just the individual members.

- Bring the focus of what we do back to the family itself.
- Recognize the importance of fathers and men and the role they have in the lives of their family and children.
- Affirm that the responsibility of raising healthy children begins with the family and provide parents with the supports they need to fulfill that responsibility.
- Reinforce informal support systems and learn from the past – when neighborhoods had front-porches and neighbors cared for each other and watched and protected others' children.
- Respect the family as the foundation of our communities and that all institutions need to actively support the family.

2. Act Before A Family Faces Crises and Is Harmed

Iowans have long been reluctant to intervene in the lives of family unless they are in crisis. However, the adage - an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, has merit. At the point of crisis or afterwards, it is usually too late to save the family structure.

- Make less costly investments earlier to reduce the need for more costly intervention and treatment.
- Recognize that the safety net starts with the family members and includes extended family, neighbors and all formal and informal support systems.
- Create a holistic approach to address the needs of the family – including, communities, faith-based groups, schools, government, health systems, the courts, businesses and the media.
- Provide adequate funding for essential social service programs.

3. Improve the Relationship Skills of All Iowans

Healthy and strong families are created and maintained when family members have the skills needed to address issues across the life span of the relationship. Education and life-skills development begin in the home. The ability to form strong relationships begins at birth. Commitment to a life-long relationship requires different skills at different stages.

- Teach relationship skills, life-skills, citizenship and parenting through both formal and informal methods including classes, mentoring, role models and the media.
- Integrate character education, decision-making, relationships, healthy choices, conflict resolution, and life development skills throughout the entire school curriculum, not just one class and not just one grade level.
- Build a stronger partnership between schools and parents.
- Establish anti-bullying programs for both victims and bullies.
- Utilize established curriculums with proven track records.

4. Bolster Families Through Economic Stability and Employer Support

Iowans have a reputation of being hard-working, productive employees. The Iowa work ethic includes taking responsibility for providing financial support for families. Financial issues continue to be a problem for many parents trying to support their families. These issues include earnings and earnings potential, financial management, and employer policies that present barriers to parents spending more time with their families. Future productivity of workers is dependent on healthy and financially secure families.

- Help families obtain competitive and livable wages and benefits that meet families' needs.
- Promote economic development that recognizes and supports the pivotal role of families.
- Create employment policies that support both fathers and mothers in fulfilling their family responsibilities.
- Secure safe, affordable, quality child care for parents when they must work.
- Recognize the need of parents to have flexibility in their work schedules.

5. Surround Families With a Comprehensive Array of Services

Iowans are fiercely independent, however, everyone needs support at some time. Families and relationships don't exist in isolation. There needs to be a community-wide commitment to help families support themselves. A wide array of services must be available and accessible to families when they need or choose to seek help.

- Help families help themselves.
- Recognize that all family members have strengths; services should build upon those strengths.
- Commit to building a collaborative, comprehensive network of services that incorporate community-based and faith-based organizations.
- Provide adequate funding for support services.
- Communicate to parents through formal and informal channels the availability of services and programs within their community.
- Support the development of community and neighborhood collaborations.
- Provide accessibility including transportation for families to receive services.

6. Utilize Best Practices & Pilot Initiatives to Produce Measurable Outcomes

With an increasing scarcity of resources, government is striving to be more efficient and produce successful outcomes.

- Utilize available state and federal funding for proven programs with measurable outcomes.
- Begin with pilot programs to test effectiveness.
- Reinforce the commitment to supporting families.
- Provide community-wide services through community-based and faith-based organizations.
- Promote best practices that support families as discussed in the recommendations above.

What Can Be Done to Support Fatherhood, Marriage and Families?

Using the information provided by participants in the focus groups, the following strategies were identified as examples of what can be done to impact families, fatherhood and marriage with a focus on what is best for the children.

What Parents and Families Can Do

- ⇒ Provide a healthy and safe environment where a child may grow up feeling loved and wanted by both parents.
- ⇒ Exhibit an unwavering commitment to the child.
- ⇒ Teach children basic relationship skills through role modeling.
- ⇒ Recognize and praise children.
- ⇒ Give parents the tools they need to successfully parent.
- ⇒ Encourage interaction with other parents, both of the same age group and older, such as a peer-to-peer parenting network.
- ⇒ Provide support and understanding to all family members when times are good and when times are bad.
- ⇒ Support the parents' relationship, as long as it is free from abuse and violence.
- ⇒ Assist and encourage parents to maintain consistent financial and emotional support for the child even after separation or divorce.
- ⇒ Expect parents to take responsibility for their children and relationships.
- ⇒ Understand that when children are involved, a relationship between the parents still exists even though there may be a separation or divorce.
- ⇒ Rely on extended family networks to assist the parents and child in coping with change.

What Local Community Leadership Can Do

- ⇒ Increase the importance of family, especially that of fathers and men in the lives of their families and children.
- ⇒ Work to provide economic stability for their communities by advocating for sustainable economic development policies and livable wages for those living in the communities.
- ⇒ Provide more after-school programs, funded and/or partially sponsored by people in the community, not just the local school system.
- ⇒ Develop a community mentors program staffed by local community members.
- ⇒ Increase collaboration among service organizations of similar mission, as well as among service organizations that, when placed together, may provide a more holistic approach to family strengthening.
- ⇒ Exercise continued tolerance and acceptance for the newest members of the Iowa community such as those who have arrived through the immigration process and are attempting to create new lives.
- ⇒ Identify gaps in each community where individuals or organizations can provide services to fathers, families and/or children. Through this process communities will have a better social service coverage as opposed to several organizations providing the same service and no organizations providing another needed service in that community.

What Schools, Educators and Caregivers Can Do

- ⇒ Create a greater sense of partnership between schools and parents.
- ⇒ Maintain contact with parents to know when the parents' relationship has ended and then be prepared to provide the child with needed support.
- ⇒ Recognize that some marriages end in the death of a parent and develop strategies to deal with children who experience a loss in this manner.
- ⇒ Train teachers to identify warning signs for when children and their families may be at risk.
- ⇒ Provide counseling services to children having difficulty coping with changes in their lives and families.
- ⇒ Integrate character education into the entire school curriculum, not just in one class.
- ⇒ Establish anti-bullying programs for both the victims and bullies.
- ⇒ Teach more life skills to students through hands-on experiential learning methods.
- ⇒ Attempt to remove the aggressive culture in schools by involving physical education teachers and athletic coaches in identifying over-aggressive behavior.
- ⇒ Encourage local school boards to continue to examine and reestablish educational priorities that are consistent with emerging needs.
- ⇒ Attract and compensate high quality teachers.
- ⇒ Teach more classes related to relationship skills and building healthy relationships.

What Employers Can Do

- ⇒ Create a family-friendly workplace that values family and children and understands the need for parents to be involved in their children's lives occasionally during work hours.
- ⇒ Help secure safe, affordable, quality child care for parents who both work.
- ⇒ Continue to strive to pay competitive and livable wages so that employees have a choice on whether both parents must work to support the family.
- ⇒ Attempt to diversify their workforce by hiring across gender, racial and ethnic lines.
- ⇒ Support and sponsor community events that promote healthy family relationships.
- ⇒ Provide tuition reimbursement or pay for additional skills training for employees to better themselves and their families.
- ⇒ Promote a flexible scheduling program that can increase employee productivity.

What the Courts and Correctional System Can Do

- ⇒ Continue to develop programs that unite inmates with their children, in an appropriate and safe environment, with special attention paid to putting fathers and their children back into contact.
- ⇒ Encourage mothers to bring their children with them to visitation sessions when appropriate to maintain the children's relationship with the father.
- ⇒ Offer more detailed parenting and relationship skills classes for incarcerated offenders and require additional class work as a condition of parole.
- ⇒ Focus on the repair and strengthening of a relationship when there is a child in the family, rather than terminating parental rights.

- ⇒ Encourage counseling and mediation.
- ⇒ Be actively involved as a safety net when there is family violence involved.
- ⇒ Implement best practices to strengthen families.
- ⇒ Order families, if free of abuse and violence, into counseling or classes to learn how to live as a separated or divorced family. If safety can be assured, provide counseling towards the goal of a healthy, safe relationship between parents.
- ⇒ Enforce financial obligations of parents, but be sensitive that circumstances change in people's lives and that orders should be re-evaluated if there is a material change in a parent's ability to pay.

What Community-Based and Faith-Based Organizations and Service Providers Can Do

- ⇒ Communicate to parents, through formal and informal channels, information on the availability of services and programs in their community.
- ⇒ Provide mechanisms for fathers to become more involved with their children.
- ⇒ Ensure that there are programs available for children to teach them character and life building skills.
- ⇒ Make sure programs are accessible to participants and attempt to provide transportation to those who cannot drive or utilize public transportation.
- ⇒ Create a centralized one-stop shop for social and community services so people do not have to attempt to locate numerous providers in numerous places.
- ⇒ Examine the family from a more holistic approach and recommend services and programs from that perspective.
- ⇒ Provide low or no-cost developmental assessments for children to determine what extra help they might need to thrive.
- ⇒ Provide cultural competency information for organizations to help better understand the definition of a healthy relationship in other cultures.
- ⇒ Subsidize or underwrite training programs for certified personnel to offer classes on marriage and relationships.
- ⇒ Encourage the development of additional child-friendly, safe shelters for victims of domestic violence.
- ⇒ Measure the outcomes of programs and then disseminate these findings to other organizations or jurisdictions in the hope that they would be considered a best practice and implemented in other places.
- ⇒ Institute pilot programs to offset resource constraints.
- ⇒ Provide services to adults and children coping with separation or divorce.
- ⇒ Study the effects of divorce on children.
- ⇒ Offer counseling services to people wanting assistance.

What Legislators and State and Local Government Can Do

- ⇒ Provide adequate funding for essential social service programs available to young families and those in positions of vulnerability.
- ⇒ Expand the current safety net of services to better cover individuals who are exhibiting troubling behaviors.
- ⇒ Increase skill-building opportunities and resources to Iowa residents.

- ⇒ Create an information and referral network to support more community-based services.
- ⇒ Develop a greater proactive mindset and focus on prevention so that Iowa is not reacting to situations related to the failure of parents' relationships and/or family.
- ⇒ Provide adequate funding to school districts so that they can provide needed services for at-risk children and to increase character building into the overall curriculum.
- ⇒ Ensure there is adequate funding for early care programs for children.
- ⇒ Focus tax policies on economic development to secure livable wages and tax credits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
- ⇒ Create an inventory of support and visitation programs across Iowa.
- ⇒ Create a set of best practices that other states and jurisdictions are doing to maintain and support healthy families.
- ⇒ Provide a packet of information to every expectant mother when she becomes pregnant and provide additional information at the time of birth explaining the necessary roles of both the mother and father in a child's life.
- ⇒ Provide information on early child care and healthy relationships in pre-natal classes.
- ⇒ Provide incentives for men and women to attend workshops and classes on strengthening relationships.

What the Media Can Do

- ⇒ Utilize its editorial powers to communicate socially-responsible opinions about our society and the roles various institutions play in making Iowa a better place for all people.
- ⇒ Portray more stories about what is going well in Iowa, not just what is failing and who is to blame.
- ⇒ Listen to community leaders and institutions about what is important in their community.
- ⇒ Recognize its power in the formation of children's opinions and attempt to manage that power in a socially responsible manner.

Appendix A

Biographies

Fatherhood, Marriage and Family Supports Advisory Group

Harry Brod, Ph.D., Cedar Falls

Harry Brod is a child of Holocaust survivors and a child of the 60's. Both heritages shape his commitments to justice, much of which he has expressed in twenty years of teaching, writing and activism in the academic study of masculinities (where he is recognized as one of the founding figures of the field) and the pro-feminist men's movement (for which he has been a leading spokesperson). He is Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at the University of Northern Iowa. His most recent book is *White Men Challenging Racism: 35 Personal Stories*. He is the editor of *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* and *A Mensch Among Men: Explorations in Jewish Masculinity*, co-editor of *Theorizing Masculinities*, and author of *Hegel's Philosophy of Politics*. He recently served as a member of the Iowa Governor's Task Force for Responsible Fatherhood, and is a member of the Board of Humanities Iowa. Harry is the father of two children.

Michael L. Canney, CFP, Des Moines

Michael Cannney is a First Vice President – Investments with Smith Barney and has been with them for 28 years. Married to his wife Anita, they have three children and have lived in Des Moines for the past 28 years. He is a graduate of Iowa State University and has served on many non-profit boards concentrating on youth and the faith community. A past board member of Variety, the Children's Charity, Michael currently serves on the Executive Board of the Mid-Iowa Council Boy Scouts of America as Vice President – Community Outreach. He is also on the board of the Des Moines-based initiative for youth – The Number One Question – Is It Good For The Kids! Michael is also a member of the Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition.

Mike Carver, Urbandale

Michael Carver works as a commercial real estate broker for Grubb & Ellis Mid-America Pacific. His passion for fathering stems from his primary role in raising his four children over the past twenty years. He has written and spoken often about successful parenting. His thoughts were featured "on being a good dad" on Father's day in 1995 by the Des Moines Register. Mike was a member of the Governor's Task Force on Responsible Fatherhood. Mike is also a member of the Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition.

Tony Dietsch, Des Moines

Tony Dietsch is the Administrator of the Division of Workforce Center Administration of Iowa Workforce Development. He has been associated with Iowa's employment and training programs for twenty-seven years. During that time he has been employed in a variety of capacities at both the State and local levels, including positions in participant counseling, staff supervision, and program administration. Tony's current responsibilities involve administration of Iowa's system of Workforce Development Centers, and oversight of multiple workforce programs, including the Workforce Investment Act, Wagner-Peyser and Welfare-to-Work. Tony has a bachelor's degree in English from St. Ambrose University and a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling from the University of Iowa. Tony was a member of the Governor's Interagency Task Force on Fatherhood and is a member of the Welfare Reform Advisory Group.

Ro Foege, State Representative, Mt. Pleasant

Ro Foege has served in the Iowa House of Representatives since 1996. Ro's part-time college job at a residential treatment center began a lifelong commitment to working with children and families. He worked with the Floyd and Linn Co. Departments of Human Services. Ro is a founding board member of both Four Oaks and Alternative Services and served on the Marion Independent School Board. Before his retirement from Grant Wood AEA in Cedar Rapids last year, Ro was a School Social Worker and in 1992, was named Iowa's "School Social Worker of the Year". Prior to his work in schools, Ro was the Director of Catholic Charities District Office in Cedar Rapids and consultant to the Linn Co. Juvenile Court. Ro and wife Susan have lived in Mt. Vernon since 1979. They have five adult children and eight grandchildren. Ro is also a member of the Welfare Reform Advisory Group.

Martha Gelhaus, Des Moines

Martha Gelhaus is a Community Health Consultant with the Iowa Department of Public Health. She provides consultation to community-based maternal and child health agencies. She also directs grant applications for funding opportunities for maternal and child health related programs. Martha has a MA degree in Public Administration. She is married and has two children. Martha was a member of the Governor's Interagency Task Force on Fatherhood.

Susan Goodenow, Ida Grove

Susan Goodenow holds degrees from the University of Oregon. She was an elementary school teacher before deciding to home school her children, which she has been doing for 20 years. Sue and her husband adopted a daughter from Korea to add to their family of four boys.

Tom Klaus, Carlisle

Tom Klaus is the founder and president of Legacy Resource Group. Tom's career has focused on helping children and youth through direct service and by training and equipping youth workers, professionals, policymakers, and parents. Tom Klaus served on the Iowa Governor's Task Force for Responsible Fatherhood. Tom earned a BA in English and Religion from William Penn University and an MS in Mental Health Counseling from Drake University. He makes his home in Carlisle, Iowa.

Charlotte Nelson, Des Moines

Charlotte Nelson has been Executive Director of the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women since March 1985, and is currently Administrator of the Division on the Status of Women in the Department of Human Rights. She grew up in East Tennessee, has lived in the East and in Wisconsin, but is an Iowan now, having lived in Des Moines since 1974. Her academic background includes a BA degree from Duke University, a master's degree from Columbia University, and the master in public administration degree from Drake University. She has worked for the League of Women Voters, Drake University, and the Iowa Department of Human Services. Charlotte represents the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, which works to promote the full participation by women in the economic, political, and social life of the state. Charlotte is a member of the Welfare Reform Advisory Group.

Fred Scaletta, Des Moines

Fred Scaletta is the Public and Media Relations Director for the Iowa Department of Corrections and has been with the Corrections Administrative Offices for the past twenty-five years. In addition to this role, Fred also oversees the Department's Victim and Restorative Justice Programs of which many children are affected as either Crime Victims or Dependents. Fred was a member of the Governor's Interagency Task Force on Fatherhood.

Laurie Schipper, Ankeny

Laurie Schipper has worked within the Battered Women's Movement for twenty years is currently the Executive Director of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Prior to Laurie's work with the Coalition, she worked in a battered women's shelter and rape crisis center in Ames, Iowa for ten years. Laurie provides technical assistance and training to domestic violence advocates and other professionals who interface with battered women and their children. Laurie serves on the Iowa STOP Violence Against Women State Coordination Council, participates in training and curriculum development, consults on public policy as it relates to domestic violence and provides expert testimony to the courts on domestic violence and the effects it has on children.

Elaine Szymoniak, Des Moines

A long time resident of Des Moines, Elaine Szymoniak holds degrees from the University of Wisconsin and Iowa State University. She practiced for many years as a speech therapist, audiologist and counselor in schools, hospitals and state agencies. Elaine served as a member of the Des Moines City Council for eleven years and served for twelve years as a State Senator. She has been a member of committees in the National League of Cities and the National Conference of State Legislatures, most recently a member of the committee on Responsible Fathers. Elaine was chair of the Governor's Task Force for Responsible Fatherhood and is a former member of the Welfare Reform Advisory Group. Elaine is married and has five children and six grandchildren.

Jim Treat, Storm Lake

Jim Treat is a former teacher and principal in the public sector of education. His degrees were received at Upper Iowa University and Colorado State University. Jim served in the US Army for two years. He is currently in his second term as a member of the City Council of Storm Lake. Jim and his wife have been married for forty-four years and have two children and four grandchildren.

Ken Veenstra, State Senator, Orange City

Ken Veenstra is an insurance agent and is in his third Iowa Senate term with two previously served terms in the House. Ken is also a member of the Welfare Reform Advisory Group. He received his CLU designation from American College in Bryn Mawr, PA and was a part of the US Army Military Police. He is a member of Farm Bureau, Gideon's, U.S. Chamber, NFIB, and Calvary Christian Reformed Church where he has served as a Church Council Elder. He is currently serving on the Dordt College Board of Trustees and has previously served on the boards of Hope Haven, Life Underwriters, and ARC as president. Senator Veenstra and his wife Jan have three children (one deceased) and 8 grandchildren.

Special Thanks to the staff to the Advisory Group from the Iowa Department of Human Services, Bureau of Collections: Jeanne Nesbit, Harold Coleman, Karen Frohwein, Tim Wiltfang and from the Division of Financial, Health and Work Supports: Ann Wiebers and Linda Mount.

Appendix B

Focus Group Overview and Site Responses

Focus Group Process Methodology

A focus group is, at its heart, a discussion among people on certain topics. This process provides excellent and possibly statistically significant information. Depending on the type and constitution of the focus group, researchers become able to make generalizations about attitudes certain demographic groups maintain toward products or topics. In this case, DHS asked Crowe Chizek to develop a focus group research design and protocol that did not seek to attain statistical significance, due to the high cost of constructing such a program. Rather, Crowe Chizek and DHS, with the assistance of the Advisory Group, developed a question protocol asked of focus group participants seeking to gain a sense of opinion on Iowan's feelings about fatherhood, marriage and family supports.

Before the focus group commenced, the facilitator asked group participants to complete a sign-in sheet, consisting of questions asking for standard demographic information (see Appendix E). Once completed, each group participant wrote the number of the corresponding line where they entered their information on the sign-in sheet on a nametag and placed it on their shirt. The focus group facilitator made it very clear to participants that names were not required in order to take part in the group. The facilitator then began asking questions, per the approved protocol (see Appendix D), and as group participants answered questions, the facilitator typed those answers into a laptop computer. Additionally, the facilitator used a digital audio recorder to capture some of the focus groups, but this device was only used if no one in the group objected.

In certain instances, the aforementioned focus group model was not applicable. In those cases, the DHS facilitator then positioned himself in a public place and requested passers-by answer no more than five questions apiece. The method proved very successful, but did not allow for collection of 100 percent of the data gathered in the traditional focus group setting. Areas in Appendix E that specify "Did Not Disclose" represent those locations where this type data collection took place.

Analysis of Focus Group Responses

Each of the 25 focus groups had a distinct theme, but certain themes became prevalent in almost each group. The most heard theme coming from virtually each group was that of personal accountability and responsibility. By this, the group participants meant that in order for a person or family to better themselves, it eventually becomes their responsibility to either make that happen or to seek assistance toward that eventual goal. Regardless of geography, race or age, personal responsibility permeated responses in many of the protocol answers.

Another heavily mentioned topic was that of methamphetamine distribution and abuse. Six focus groups referred to their community as the "Meth Capital of Iowa." Within many of the groups, there were individuals who have either been abusers, parents or children of abusers or victims of the crime and violence associated with methamphetamine abuse. Participants made dozens of comments about how this drug is not just relegated to inner cities; rather it has found a home in Iowa's rural areas and is destroying the family fabric for thousands of the State's residents. Many group members mentioned the need to aggressively pursue those who deal in illegal drugs, but also to aggressively treat those who are addicted to them as well.

The final thematic point from the focus groups was Iowa's definition of a family. One may think that Iowans may define a family as a married man and woman with children. While this example did come up in discussion, a majority of group participants consider family in a more abstract sense. By examining the focus group raw data, Iowans roughly define a family as a group of people who provide mutual love and support for one another in a safe and nurturing environment. There was no specific mention of familial

relation or gender specificity. Group participants noted the importance of extended family and friends as a needed social safety net to ensure that children are raised properly.

Discussion of Individual Focus Groups

The DHS facilitator conducted 25 focus groups across the State of Iowa and sought out and gathered input from an array of constituencies, with a concerted effort to receive input from various demographics based on geography, socioeconomic status, racial or ethnic background, as well as specialized constituencies such as domestic violence survivors/advocates and faith-centered communities. The following table shows where the focus group took place and the week of October it occurred.

<u>Week 1</u>	<u>Week 2</u>	<u>Week 3</u>	<u>Week 4</u>
Red Oak	Des Moines – Fathers Group	Iowa City - U of I Campus	Dubuque
Rockwell City	Des Moines – Domestic Violence Survivors/ Advocates	Waterloo	Cedar Rapids
Council Bluffs	Des Moines – Faith Centered Individuals	Mason City	Davenport
Storm Lake	Ames - Community	Norwalk	Urbandale
LeMars	Ames - ISU Campus	Ottumwa	Burlington
Sioux City	Marshalltown	Creston	Fort Madison
	Mitchellville		

These focus groups involved over 260 individual participants. Many of the aforementioned demographics represented in the focus groups provided excellent feedback. The following pages detail information gathered from each of the 25 focus groups with themes and comments from those participants.

Red Oak

The Red Oak focus group piggybacked onto an existing Chamber of Commerce monthly business leaders meeting. At that meeting, five individuals provided input on the three subject topics (fatherhood, marriage, and family supports). The comments provided by the Red Oak focus group participants was in keeping with the rural character of the community, with a concern and focus on the well being and strengthening of the family unit. When asked how to define a family, 100% of the respondents remarked that a family is one that has two people who are legally married. The response was then juxtaposed against comments made by group participants that if two people have a child together, that alone is not enough reason to get married, with the focus always being on the needs and well being of the child.

Rockwell City – Men’s Prison

This focus group took place at the Iowa Department of Correction's Rockwell City facility and consisted of 16 incarcerated males approximately between 20 and 50 years of age. All but two of these individuals had children and their lengths of sentence ranged from 2 years to 17 years. The largest part of the discussion centered on custody issues and the perceived mistreatment they received at the hands of the court system and the Department of Human Services. Despite the spirited discussion on these topics, the inmates provided insightful feedback on the role that fathers play in the lives of their children.

The inmates expressed the need for the father to be a hero in the child's life. Many provided personal anecdotes regarding the lack of a father figure in their lives and how that facilitated some of the poor choices they had made over the years. The other main theme that came from this focus group was the need for clear and consistent communication between all members of the family unit, nuclear and extended. Many participants defined responsible fathers and mothers as people who provide clear and timely communication to their partner. There was also a large portion of participants who felt the faith community plays a large role in the well being of the family, but many also expressed comments that they did not realize the role faith played in family well being until after they were incarcerated.

Council Bluffs

The Council Bluffs participants were from two distinct groups, with approximately one half of the 20 individuals from a social service background and the remainder were Iowa residents who worked at the Ameristar Council Bluffs riverboat casino. Many of the social service participants focused their comments on the need of the family, especially young fathers and mothers, to take advantage of the programs and funds available to assist them in providing a viable, self-sufficient and nurturing environment for their children. Several participants paid special attention to the need for male role models and mentors for young boys and fathers, noting that many social service employees are female and that may provide a barrier due to possible gender communication difficulties.

The casino employees provided a distinctly different perspective to the focus group questions. Many of the responses from the casino participants came from real life experiences and how they dealt or managed those situations. There was wide agreement within this group, as well as within the social service provider group, that illegal drugs, especially the proliferation of methamphetamine production and addiction, is destroying the family fabric, and that is it not a problem contained to metropolitan areas in the United States.

Storm Lake

The Storm Lake focus group participants came from the city's large Hispanic population. Like many midwestern states, Iowa continues to witness exponential growth in its Hispanic population. Many members of Iowa's Hispanic communities work in the agricultural and farm animal production industries. Except for one Hispanic male, the focus group participants were single Hispanic mothers, with limited English skills.

Group participants noted that a child is in an ideal environment when the family is in good economic health, especially where the father is part of the child's life and provides a steady stream of income for the family. There was particular attention paid to the role of the male in the Hispanic community and opinions regarding Hispanic male gender roles. Also, group participants provided feedback on the role of sexuality in the Hispanic community and how it is considered taboo to a certain extent to discuss intimate matters with other people, even if there are problems within the family structure.

The other main area of discussion centered on what employers can do to strengthen families. With many Hispanics in Iowa working in lower-wage positions, the flexibility provided to them is generally limited. One mother noted that, "split shifts destroy families," which is contrary to conventional thinking that in a two-parent split shift working arrangement, certain benefits accrue since there is always one parent at home with the child. The group participant further noted that this type of work arrangement may be beneficial for the child due to having one parent at home with the child at all times, but the stress placed on the marriage or domestic situation, more than offsets the benefits gained by having around-the-clock parental involvement.

LeMars

Due to scheduling difficulties, only two individuals participated in the LeMars focus group. The opinions of the focus group participants were focused on preserving and promoting the traditional family structure and providing incentives for individuals, especially who have children together, to get or remain married.

Group participants did not feel that living together prior to marriage would assist in that marriage's eventual success; rather both participants cited statistics to the contrary. Additionally, group participants stressed the need for active involvement of the faith community in all aspects of people's lives, from pre-marriage counseling to using religion and religious belief systems as a moral framework for child rearing.

Sioux City

Seven individuals from educational and social service backgrounds participated in the Sioux City focus group. There was a diversity of opinion among focus group participants in areas such as the definition of a family, with some noting the traditional definition and other participants feeling that a family is any unit that "shares the joys and all things involved when you live with other people." Another focus group participant pointed out the cultural differences regarding the definition of family, drawing specific reference to the considerable Native American population in and around the Sioux City metropolitan area.

The focus group participants also cited statistics regarding the ineffectiveness of living together prior to marriage, but noted that the need to be able to effectively communicate to each other may be enhanced by pre-marriage cohabitation. Discussion on the topics of responsible fatherhood and motherhood centered on the blending of the traditional roles between the male and female; and how the father is now more responsible for duties once reserved for the mother, and how the mother is now expected to provide income for the family unit, as well as be the nurturing member of the couple.

Des Moines – Fathers Group

The Drake University's responsible fathers program publicized this focus group to its members and affiliate organizations, and seven individuals participated. The group consisted of divorced fathers, but a unique attribute of two of the group participants was that they brought along their fathers, who were divorced themselves. The group participants were very clear in their opinions of a responsible father being a person who is there for his child and partner, and providing emotional, physical and financial support to the relationship. They also noted that the role of a responsible father does not reduce after a divorce, rather there is an absolute need to play an active role in the raising of the child (if the father is non-custodial) and to fulfill all child support and other financial obligations. Additionally, group participants noted the need to maintain good communication with the mother even after a divorce or ceasing of the relationship and stressed respect for the custodial parent's authority over the child, regardless of who has custody.

Due to the multigenerational makeup of the focus group, the questions asked about how the roles of men/fathers and women/mothers have changed from prior generations, elicited insightful feedback. The older group participants drew from their prior experiences and noted that their son had to take a much more active role in the raising of their children, from changing diapers to providing emotional support and nurturing the child. Group participants also noted that the family itself bears the final responsibility for its well-being and that if two people have a child together, the default assumption would be marriage, barring the presence of abuse or other risk factors. One group participant noted that if two people have a child together, the relationship itself is the platform, but marriage is a symbol of stability that cannot be duplicated.

Des Moines – Faith Centered Individuals

A group of faith-centered individuals gathered for a focus group in Des Moines. Ten participants of varying ages and backgrounds took part and provided feedback to the survey questions. Group

participants felt that fathers were mandatory to a child's well being, and that they need to be physically, mentally and emotionally present for the child. Additionally, group participants noted that fathers, or at least strong male role models, are important for female children, allowing them to develop self-esteem and teaching them to interact with males with the end result being the ability to develop healthy relationships with men into adulthood.

When asked to define a responsible father and mother, responses from group participants did not differ greatly from other groups, except it was consistently stated that the absolute need of a strong spiritual grounding is an integral parenting trait. Group participants also noted the increasing attention paid to the cultural differences in the definition of the family unit, but also felt that religious perspectives need to be included in the policy discussions about what constitutes a family and what benefits and responsibilities accrue to those within that definition.

Group participants were against living together prior to marriage and felt that such an arrangement does not help, but rather it makes the relationship weaker. When asked about marriage and unmarried parents, virtually all group participants felt that it was best to get married, especially before the child was born. Some group members did note that although growing up in a married, two-parent household is the best possible arrangement, there are many factors such as age and commitment to the relationship that must be considered before marrying a person.

Des Moines – Domestic Violence Survivors / Advocates

Another demographic especially targeted by this study is survivors and advocates of domestic violence, and that focus group consisted of 10 women and 1 man, from a wide range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. A common theme from this group was that any environment or situation must be abuse free, and by abuse they define that as physical, emotional, sexual and mental types of abuse, as well as actions and situations stemming from untreated illegal substance use, alcohol abuse and/or mental illness.

The group had split opinions about marriage and its purported benefits, with several group members commenting that children can thrive in any environment that is abuse free and where there is love in the home. Other pertinent comments from the group include strong opinions against mandated counseling of estranged couples, with group members citing statistics and anecdotal information regarding safety concerns if partners are placed in counseling and there is a possible, non-reported abusive relationship.

Ames – Campus

The facilitator conducted a focus group on the campus of Iowa State University following a different format than the other groups. Instead of gathering input from a set number of individuals, the facilitator gathered input from a flow of university students over a period of four hours. Students spent no more than 10 minutes of their time and answered a portion of the focus group survey questions. This process proved quite successful in gathering a range of opinions from a diverse group of individuals.

The college students surveyed felt that the roles of the responsible mother and father were essentially the same, except that the mother has traditionally been the nurturer and the father the disciplinarian. When asked how those roles change, if at all, after a divorce, respondents noted that there is no real role change, but the father needed to make sure he maintained an active relationship with the child. All respondents assumed the mother maintained custody of the child.

The definition of family was broad, with respondents making no distinction between nuclear or extended family or the sex of the individuals in the family unit, just as long as there was a loving and caring environment. Virtually all respondents felt that living together prior to marriage or two unmarried people living together was an acceptable arrangement, helping people get to know their partner better prior to a larger commitment.

Ames – General Community

The facilitator conducted another focus group in the general community, held at a local coffee shop in Downtown Ames. Five people participated, all females in their teens and twenties, and comments centered on family responsibility and the roles of parents. Group participants felt although there were traditional differences between the roles of responsible mothers and fathers, that those differences have been blurred by today's cultural standards.

Comments during this focus group also specified the need for faith in the lives of people, especially children. Three of the five participants felt that it was not right to live together before marriage, and churches have a large role in providing counseling services to people who seek them out. Also, a majority of group participants felt that there is a stigma attached to children who live with parents who are not married, and the parents owe the child an explanation once they are old enough to understand, as to why there is not a marriage in place.

Marshalltown

Fifteen individuals of varying ethnic, age and socioeconomic backgrounds attended the Marshalltown focus group. The group was split, with approximately 85% coming from a father education group and the remaining 15% were unmarried Hispanic mothers. Group participants defined a responsible father in a marriage as a person who spends quality time with his children and who respects his partner. This definition did not change with asked the definition of a responsible father after a divorce, but participants noted the importance of communication between the mother and father to ensure the child did not fall through the cracks or become a pawn in the disagreements between the estranged couple.

Comments regarding reactions to a scenario where a non-custodial father was not paying child support or attempting to actively parent his child were very strong. Group participants felt that a father in that situation should have his parental rights terminated, but opinions were just as strong against a custodial parent who is denying visitation to the other parent. Despite the strong comments toward revocation of parental rights and contempt of court rulings, group participants also commented about the need to find and expose the root cause of this behavior. Group participants made numerous comments regarding the problem that arrives from the prevalent use of methamphetamine and how this drug destroys families and places children at risk.

Mitchellville – Women's Prison

This focus group consisted of a class of inmates at the Iowa State Women's Penitentiary in Mitchellville. These female inmates attend a pre-release class that seeks to initiate and promote discussion about life skills and proper choices. This class had 22 female students, with all but one having at least one child. Additionally, one male instructor participated in the discussions.

Group participants felt that personal responsibility was the key to success at marriage and life in general. There was sympathy for young males with many comments made about how difficult circumstances are for disadvantaged young males, especially young fathers. Comments about child support were not accusatory toward men, but rather sympathetic, noting that many men simply cannot afford to pay the entire child support payment each month and still adequately provide for themselves.

There was also considerable discussion about the importance of extended family. Well over half of the female inmates had their children living with a grandparent, not the biological father, some of which are also currently incarcerated. The African-American participants went further to note that extended family is an integral part of their social fabric and that problems arise when there are disruptions in the extended family structure.

Iowa City – Campus

Eleven unmarried males between the ages of 18 years and 22 years attending the University of Iowa comprised this focus group. The group took place at a fraternity house and all participants were members of the same organization. Group participants had very strong opinions about the role of the father and how he should be the leader of the family and the source of strength, but their opinions about the role of a responsible mother did not reveal comments subjecting women to a traditional, passive role. Rather, group participants noted that a responsible mother is much like a responsible father, but who is more affectionate toward the children and other partner.

Opinions were just as strong when group participants were asked if a couple should get married if they have a child together. The young men responded that this was not proper, citing several personal examples of where such actions actually were to the detriment of the child. On a similar note, all participants who responded to questions regarding living together before marriage felt that this was an acceptable behavior and that it makes a relationship stronger in the long run because of the ability to become more acquainted with the other individual.

Waterloo

The Waterloo focus group was a targeted demographic selection, seeking to identify opinions from the city's well-established African-American population. Ten individuals took part in the focus group discussions, mainly from social service agencies, but several members of the city's African-American general population also participated. The gender of the group was 8 females and 2 males.

When asked about the importance of fathers on a child's well-being, group participants responded that fathers are responsible for the overall development of their child, just as much as the mother. Others noted that gender-appropriate modeling behavior is one of the greatest strengths a father brings to his child, especially for adolescent females, in forging proper relationships with other males. The role of a responsible father in a marriage elicited similar responses from group participants, where the father is the leader and the financial, emotional and spiritual head of the household. When asked about shared parenting, participants did not feel that having the male as the leader of the household inferred that he was no less a partner in the parenting of any of the children that may be in the home or that the mother was in a diminished role.

The questions dealing with the generational change between mothers and fathers, group participants felt that fathers have a greater role in the emotional development and well being of their child than in generations past and are expected to take more of an active role in parenting the children. For women, the group commented that historically African-American females have always been in the workforce. Compared to other racial and ethnic groups where women have traditionally stayed at home with the children, African-American females worked in domestic and other service-related professions; thusly, the generational change of women in the workforce was not perceived to be as great.

Mason City

Four mothers attended the Mason City focus group. Stability was the most talked-about topic during the focus group, with participants remarking that a stable and loving environment is the ideal situation for a child, and that stability and consistency were attributes of both responsible fathers and mothers. Expanding on the stability theme, group members felt that domestic abuse and untreated drug and alcohol abuse were the most important reasons not to get married or to prevent a parent from seeing his or her child. These were also the main reasons given for ending a marriage.

When asked about who is best suited to provide counseling services to couples seeking assistance in their relationship, participants felt that a licensed professional was the best individual to provide that service. When asked about the faith communities and family/friends, groups participants responded that although some benefit may be taken from these individuals, there also may be a predisposition toward a

certain outcome or person. They felt that counseling should continue as long as needed, as that this is a decision that must be made on a case-by-case basis, with the couple covering its cost unless they cannot afford it. If the couple is unable to afford counseling, group participants felt that Medicaid should cover the fees or that a sliding fee-for-service scale be provided to low- to moderate-income families.

Norwalk – High School

In an attempt to gather input from younger Iowans, a focus group took place at Norwalk High School in a family living class containing approximately 25 high school sophomores, juniors and seniors. These students were from varied socioeconomic backgrounds and, according to their teacher, possess a range of academic abilities. When asked, just over 50% of the students came from a divorced family.

The high school students felt that a family is a group of people who care about each other, who may or may not be related. There was no mention that a family is a married man and woman with a child. Similarly, when asked about unmarried people and children, the students responded that this is not a reason in and of itself to get married, but they feel that children are better off when they are in an environment where the parents are married and living together in an abuse-free home.

When asked what employers can do about helping to strengthen families, the students responded that the need for flexibility was important, with several students recalling personal instances of employer inflexibility that affected their parents. The students felt that spending more time as a family unit and less time watching television or working was the best solution for strengthening families in Iowa.

Ottumwa

Participants from the Ottumwa focus group were asked to participate by direct solicitation. Five individuals agreed to participate and were all male and over the age of 65. These men felt that a family is a married man and a woman, who attend church on a regular basis. They also felt that children are better off in an environment where both parents are married, but that the home must be free from abuse. When asked about who is best suited to provide counseling to troubled couples, a majority of the group responded that members of the faith communities, namely priests, were the people to provide this service.

The Ottumwa group members also noted the prevalence and problems coming from the abuse of methamphetamines in rural areas. Several group members had children or knew of children of friends who had or are currently abusing this and other drugs. They stressed the importance of extended family and how it is as important now as it has ever been. The group further discussed the changing role of men and women in today's society and the growing tendency toward independence and less reliance on others. Group participants did not have a problem with this phenomenon, but added that when there is a problem with one or both of the parents that safety net of extended family and friends may not be present due to this tendency toward total independence.

Creston

The Creston focus group contained educators, social service agency employees and a private management consultant. There were eight people present, with seven females and one male. The group commented on the importance of the different parenting skills fathers possess, and that those skills are just as important and many times complimentary to the mother's skills in the parenting process. Group participants were split in their opinions about the benefits of pre-marital counseling. With several members strongly in favor of it and other who felt that it did not bring an overall benefit to the relationship.

The group felt that it was not good for people to live together before marriage, but felt that this is becoming a societal norm and that there is little to do to discourage especially younger couples from engaging in that activity. When asked if their opinions change if two people have a child together, group participants felt that having both parents in the same home became more important, but noted that this

was not a complete reason for getting married. One group participant from the social service field noted that she was seeing more young men moving into the home of the expectant mother's parents, instead of the young couple attempting to go it along, especially if they are still quite young.

Dubuque

The Dubuque focus group was attended by only one individual. The person did provide input on each question, and the facilitator gathered additional input from community members by direct solicitation. Several group participants noted the importance of the stepparent in the well being of a child. They noted that it was important that the stepparent be aware of his or her role and how that role changes if the other biological parent is not involved in the life of the child. If they are involved, participants commented, the stepparent needs to respect the non-custodial parent and his or her authority over that child. Also important is that the stepparent be very clear that they are not there to replace their biological parent, but rather to assure the child that they are an advocate for them and have their best interests at heart.

Group participants commented that a responsible parent is one that provides the child with routine. They further noted that children who do not have routine in their lives might be more likely to have trouble in school and other developmental areas. Even in a divorce arrangement, the mother and father can still provide the child with routine, albeit in a different manner. This sentiment carried over into questions regarding situations where it is best for a parent not to have contact with his or her children. Group members noted that inconsistent visitation might be more harmful to the child than not having contact with that parent at all.

Urbandale

Five individuals attended the Urbandale focus group which consisted of educators and administrators from a suburban school district. Group participants noted the importance of proper male role models in children's lives. They said that children emulate the behavior of the predominant male influence, and that children learn how to treat other people based on the way that this modeling behavior takes place. Again, stability permeated the discussion with group participants noting that the best possible environment for children is one that is stable and safe, recognizing that all relationships are not perfect. Extended family becomes important and acts as a pressure release for the times when stresses occur in the relationship. One group participant noted that the marriage should be the primary focus of effort in the relationship and that children are satellites around the marriage. If the marriage is good and healthy, then the parents will treat the children well and the kids will be happy and well adjusted.

When asked about the definition of a responsible parent in a marriage, the group noted that it depends on the age of the child because responsibility for a father and mother is greatly different for a newborn versus the parents of a teenager. The role is not diminished as the child ages, rather the definition of responsibility changes as the needs to the child grow and evolve.

Cedar Rapids

The Cedar Rapids focus group was attended by five individuals, two men and three women. Group participants were more concerned with the underlying motives of actions of supposed deadbeat dads and mothers who do not let fathers see their children. Individuals made comments regarding the need to not overreact to situations where there may be relationship problems or conflict between divorced or estranged parents.

On the topics of cohabitation and its subsequent effects upon relationships, group participants noted that commitment to each other is the most important attribute to a relationship, not whether or not people are living together or if they have a child. If there is a true commitment by both partners, then there will be stability and a loving environment where children will be able to thrive.

Davenport

Davenport group participants were from a provided list of community leaders and activists. In addition to those invitees, a group of domestic violence survivors and advocates from Clinton traveled to Davenport to share their views and opinions. The focus group contained six people, three Davenport community members and three from Clinton.

The group felt that there is little to no change in the role of a mother, no matter the type of living arrangement she has, but the role of the father does change if the mother retains custody of the child. The father must put aside any bitterness he may harbor toward the mother and work to forge a good relationship with his child, and show respect to the mother, especially in the child's presence.

They defined a family as a group of individuals who show a mutual care and nurturing for each other. Additionally, the group felt that living together prior to marriage was an acceptable practice, but if there is a child in the situation, then the parents must be very careful in their decision-making about whether or not to get married. Group participants also felt that schools play a large role in supporting and maintaining healthy families since schools are the common denominator to families with children. Since children spend so much of their formative years in the classroom, the school's role in the assisting in teaching of good social skills and identifying potential home problems cannot be discounted.

Burlington

Burlington focus group members participated through direct solicitation, as a group of fifteen individuals (8 women and 7 men) answered between three questions and eight questions apiece. The theme of personal responsibility carried through all the group answers. They feel that the family is the institution that has the first and final responsibility for its own success and happiness, and other institutions such as government; schools, churches and employers are simply mechanisms that allow the family the ability to chart their happiness and success.

Fort Madison

The facilitator conducted the Fort Madison focus group in a similar fashion to the Burlington group. Possibly due to their geographic proximity, many of the responses from the 10 group participants were very similar to those provided in Burlington. Themes of family responsibility and a distrust of government involvement were the most discussed comments. Fort Madison respondents also made comments that there is a huge threat to the family and to people in general with the increase in methamphetamine use and abuse in this part of the State of Iowa. The group felt that meth use is leading to a unraveling of the traditional roles once played by mothers, fathers, grandparents and other members of a extended family support system.

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

Fatherhood

1. In what ways are fathers/stepfathers important to a child's well being?
2. Specifically, how important are stepparents to a child's well being?
 - a. Does it make a difference if the other parent is not alive/not involved?
3. What are the characteristics of an environment where children are in an ideal environment?
4. How would you describe a responsible father?
 - a. In a marriage
 - b. After a divorce
 - c. In a co-habiting family
 - d. After co-habitation ends
 - e. When Dad never lived with Mom
5. How would you describe a responsible mother?
 - a. In a marriage
 - b. After a divorce
 - c. In a co-habiting family
 - d. After co-habitation ends
 - e. When Mom never lived with Dad
6. What type of things do we expect from fathers that are different than in generations past?
7. What type of things do we expect from mothers that are different than in generations past?
8. In what situations is it best for one parent not to have contact with the child(ren)?
9. If a non-custodial father is not paying child support, is not visiting, and/or is not actively parenting his child(ren) what should be happen?

Marriage

10. In your opinion, how would you define a family?
11. What impact do you feel pre-marriage counseling would have on the success of a marriage?
12. If two unmarried people have a child together, what do you feel they should do regarding marriage?
13. Are children better off in a household where their parents are married? Why or why not?
14. Are children better off when their unmarried parent marries someone who is not their parent?
15. Is there a difference for children if they live in a household where both parents live together but are unmarried?
16. What are your thoughts about a couple living together if they are not married?
 - a. Does age matter?
 - b. How does your opinion change about a man and a woman living together if they have a child together?
 - c. Are the children better off when their unmarried parent lives with someone who is not their parent?
17. Do you think that living together helps make a resulting marriage stronger, weaker, or has no impact on the success of the marriage?
18. Can you think of situations where it is best to not to get married?
19. What are some circumstances when a marriage should end?
 - a. Does this change if there are children involved?

20. If a couple files for divorce or seeks help with their marriage, what are your opinions about counseling?
 - a. Who should provide the counseling (minister, social service agency, psychological professional, etc.)?
 - b. How long should it continue before a judgment is made about whether the marriage can be saved?
 - c. Who should pay for this service (the individual taking the counseling, state or local government, etc.)?
21. If a mother and father are divorced, what should the level of involvement be for each parent?
22. What should happen if the custodial parent doesn't allow visitation or parental involvement of the other parent?

Family Supports

23. What institution has the greatest responsibility for building healthy families?
24. What could/should churches/the faith communities do to support the healthy families?
25. What could/should schools do to support healthy families?
26. What could/should the government do to support healthy families?
27. What could/should employers do to support healthy families?
28. What do you think can be done to strengthen families across Iowa? Whose responsibility is it?
29. In closing, what is best for Iowa's children?

Appendix D

Focus Group Responses

The Focus Group Responses contain the top common comments/themes gathered from all focus group participants. Following the various statements is the percentage of times the comment was made.

It is important to consider that as most of the responses were gathered during group discussions, this percentage may not capture the total percent of individuals that agreed with the comment, but only the number of times it was stated and recorded. Frequently individuals would simply add on to a previously made, agreed upon comment or if not agreed upon, offer another viewpoint during the discussion.

This does not capture every comment/theme expressed during the focus groups. Statements expressed only once or perhaps twice will not appear in this list.

Fatherhood

1. In what ways are fathers/stepfathers important to a child's well being?

- Fathers are important as role models (36%)
- Emotional support/stability (28%)
- Balance/male perspective (18%)
- Financial (10%)
- Authority/boss/head of household (8%)

2. Specifically, how important are stepparents to a child's well being?

- As important or the same as the biological parent (65%)
- Negative remarks/causes problems/should stay out of child's life (19%)
- Depends on the parents involved (11%)
- Best for children if all parents involved work for the good of the child (5%)

a. Does it make a difference if the other parent is not involved/alive?

- More important (66%)
- Stepfathers can be bad/more trouble (14%)
- Best for children if *all* parents work together or at least let children know it isn't their fault (10)
- Stepparent should be supportive of biological parent (10%)

3. What are the characteristics of an environment where children are in an ideal environment?

- Two parents/good marriage/parents love and respect each other (28%)
- Love (21%)
- Safe/Stable (21%)
- Financially secure/enough money/place to live (13%)
- Discipline (loving)/boundaries (9%)
- Faith-based/church going (8%)

4. How would you describe a responsible father?

a. Responsible father – married

- Someone who provides for family (52%)
- Loves his wife and children (33%)
 - Good communicator (15%)

b. Responsible father – divorced

- Stay involved in the children's lives (50%)
- Respect and support the custodial parent (24%)
- Pay child support (15%)

- No real change from being married (11%)
- c. Responsible father – cohabitation**
 - No different than marriage (43%)
 - Need to show sense of permanence and stability to child (40%)
 - This is an undesirable situation (17%)
- d. Responsible father – after cohabitation ends**
 - Same responsibilities under Divorce section (63%)
 - Must continue being committed to children (37%)
- e. Responsible father – when dad never lived with mom**
 - No change from when married or divorced (72%)
 - Varies by if the father knows about the child or the mother's desire for involvement (28%)

5. How would you describe a responsible mother?

- a. Responsible mother – married**
 - Nurturing and affectionate (66%)
 - No different than role of father (34%)
- b. Responsible mother – divorced**
 - Must assume greater financial and parenting responsibilities and becomes both parents to an extent (73%)
 - Ensure the father is part of the child's life (27%)
- c. Responsible mother – cohabitation**
 - No different than the mother's role in a marriage (67%)
 - Must show this is a loving and secure environment (33%)
- d. Responsible mother – after cohabitation ends**
 - No different than her role after a divorce (50%)
 - Need to provide a safe and stable environment (50%)
- e. Responsible mother – when dad never lived with mom**
 - No change from role of mother in other situations (63%)
 - Depends on if the mother knows about the father (37%)

6. What type of things do we expect from fathers that are different than in generations past?

- They now take more of an active role in the household duties and in the raising of their children (89%)
- More willing to show emotion in family and toward children (11%)

7. What type of things do we expect from mothers that are different than in generations past?

- Women now are part of the workforce (83%)
- They are more willing to be the disciplinarian (17%)

8. In what situations is it best for one parent not to have contact with the child(ren)?

- Abuse or neglect of the child or domestic partner (58%)
- Untreated substance abuse, alcohol abuse or mental illness (30%)
- When the other parent does not want to see or engages in activity consistent with not wanting to see the child (12%)

9. If a non-custodial father is not paying child support, is not visiting, and/or is not actively parenting his child(ren) what should be happen?

- Garnishee his wages (30%)
- Terminate parental rights (28%)
- See to find out why this action is taking place (23%)
- Put him in jail (4.5%)
- Should not force a child on a person who does not want to be involved (4.5%)

Marriage

10. In your opinion, how would you define a family?

- People who live together and are loving and committed to each other, with or without children (48%)
- Extended family is just as important as nuclear family (29%)
- Two people married, with or without children (23%)

11. What impact do you feel pre-marriage counseling would have on the success of a marriage?

- A positive impact because you must talk about things you otherwise would not (36%)
- Not much of an impact (36%)
- Should be required to get married (14%)
- It depends on the couples and types of counseling involved (14%)

12. If two unmarried people have a child together, what do you feel they should do regarding marriage?

- Don't get married just for the child, do what is in the child's best interests (68%)
- Get married if you love each other and want to raise the child together (32%)

13. Are children better off in a household where their parents are married?

- Yes, if the environment is safe and nurturing (60%)
- Not really because do not need to be married to have healthy kids (40%)

14. Are children better off when their unmarried parent marries someone who is not their parent?

- a. Yes, if that stepparent makes the child feel like part of a safe family (69%)
- b. Possibly no because it may lead to abuse or favoritism of other children (31%)

15. Is there a difference for children if they live in a household where both parents live together but are unmarried?

- Already answered in previous questions (57%)
- Makes a difference because kids know and need an explanation (43%)

16. What are your thoughts about a couple living together if they are not married?

- It is okay because it is a personal choice and may help with compatibility issues (67%)
- Should not live together and not be married and hurts long term relationship (33%)

a. Does age matter?

- Must be of legal age and some emotional maturity (48%)
- Age does not matter, as long as you love the other person (32%)
- Should not live together at all if they are not married (20%)

b. How does your opinion change about a man and a woman living together if they have a child together?

- It is acceptable, if they are mature enough to handle it and focus on the child (72%)
- These people need to get married (28%)

- c. Are the children better off when their unmarried parent lives with someone who is not their parent?
- Not a good environment if there are multiple partners and the chance for abuse increases (73%)
- Sets a bad example for the child (27%)

17. Do you think that living together helps make a resulting marriage stronger, weaker, or has no impact on the success of the marriage?

- Makes the relationship stronger (45%)
- Makes the relationship weaker (34%)
- It depends or has little to no effect on the relationship (21%)

18. Can you think of situations where it is best to not to get married?

- Incompatibility (41%)
- Domestic abuse (24%)
- If you have a child out of wedlock (19%)
- Untreated alcohol or drug abuse (16%)

19. Can you think of situations where it is best to not to get married?

- Abuse of partner or children (46%)
- When there is no more love, trust or respect in the relationship (39%)
- Infidelity (5%)

20. Abuse notwithstanding, does this change if there are children involved?

- You try to work harder at the relationship for the child's sake (63%)
- It is worse for children to be in a bad marriage (22%)
- The reasons do not change (15%)

21. If a couple files for divorce or seeks help with their marriage, what are your opinions about counseling?

a. Who would provide the counseling (minister, social service agency, psychological professional, etc.)?

- Qualified and licensed therapist or mental health professional (41%)
- Member of the faith community (41%)
- A person or couple the troubled-couple trusts (18%)

b. How long should it continue before a judgment is made about whether the marriage can be saved?

- Cannot put a time limit on it, it depends on each couple (76%)
- More than just a few sessions (24%)

c. Who should pay for this service (the individual taking the counseling, state or local government, etc.)?

- State or federal government (41%)
- The couple or split between both people (37%)
- The couple but on a sliding scale if can't afford full fee arrangement (15%)
- The person requesting the counseling (7%)

22. If a mother and father are divorced, what should the level of involvement be for each parent?

- Already answered by prior questions

23. What should happen if the custodial parent doesn't allow visitation or parental involvement of the other parent?

- Hold the parent in contempt of court and/or jail the parent (55%)
- Find out why visitation is being withheld (33%)
- Revoke parental rights (12%)

Family Supports

24. What institution has the greatest responsibility for building/maintaining healthy families?

- The family itself, nuclear and extended (67%)
- Society (13%)
- Faith communities (11%)
- Government (9%)

25. What can faith communities do to build/maintain healthy families?

- Provide counseling to people requesting it (43%)
- Sets a proper and moral standard for families (30%)
- Should not play a role (27%)

26. What can schools do to build/maintain healthy families?

- Encourage greater parental involvement in kid's lives (46%)
- Teach more life skills to kids (31%)
- Have character education and prayer allowed back in school (23%)

27. What can government do to build/maintain healthy families?

- Provide funding to organizations and agencies who work to help families and children (70%)
- Stay out of people's lives (20%)
- Provide a safety net for those who need it the most (10%)

28. What can employers do to build/maintain healthy families?

- Have a more flexible policy for parents to care for children or be involved (46%)
- Provide on-site daycare (20%)
- Pay a livable wage, with better benefits (18%)
- Become more family-friendly (16%)

29. What can be done to strengthen families across Iowa?

- Keep government involvement to a minimum and reform what areas government is involved in currently (70%)
- Help those who need help with parenting, addiction, etc. (30%)

30. What is best for Iowa's children?

- More and earlier forms of education for children (100%)

Appendix E

Focus Group Demographic Information

Summary Statistics

Number of Focus Groups	25
Number of Cities Visited	22
Number of Participants	265
Male	42.6%
Female	57.4%
Caucasian	78.9%
African-American	12.1%
Hispanic	7.2%
Other	1.9%
Youngest Participant	17
Eldest Participant	72
Least Number of Children	0
Most Number of Children	7
Single	47.2%
Married	39.9%
Divorced	12.4%
Widowed	0.5%
Protestant	58.6%
Catholic	23.4%
Jewish	0.7%
Muslim	0.7%
None	16.6%
Less than High School Education	19.6%
High School Diploma/GED	25.0%
Some College/Technical Training	22.8%
Baccalaureate Degree	22.3%
Graduate/Professional Degree	10.3%
Professional	25.7%
Government	20.4%
Farm/Labor	15.1%
Service	15.1%
Clerical	13.8%
Retired	6.6%
Unemployed	3.3%

Appendix F

Statistics Regarding Fatherhood, Marriage and Family

Impact of Marriage on Child Well-Being

ECONOMIC WELL BEING

- **Children raised by single or divorced mothers are 7 times more likely to be poor than children raised in intact, married families. These children will spend 51% of their lives in poverty.** National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1996.
- **The median annual income of married parents is \$41,000, \$19,000 for divorced or single parents and \$15,000 for never married, single parents.** Federal Reserve Board, Survey of Consumer Finance, 1998.
- **Children from families with incomes below \$15,000 were 22 times more likely to experience abuse than children in families with incomes above \$30,000. Children of single parents are at much greater risk of abuse or neglect than children living with both parents.** Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Indicators of Child Well-Being.

EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

- **Children from single parent households fail to complete high school twice as often as children from married households (26% single households opposed to 13% in married households).** Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Indicators of Child Well-Being.
- **Children in poverty are less likely to participate in clubs, sports and lessons.** US Census Department, Child Well-Being Indicators from SIPP, April 1998
- **Children in married families are less likely to have behavioral problems such as lying, stealing, damaging school property, getting drunk, hurting someone to the extent they needed medical treatment, skipping school or having their parents come to school for an offense.** National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1996.
- **Children in married families are twice less likely to be expelled from school than children from divorced families and four times less likely than children with never married mothers.** National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, Wave II, 1996.

HEALTH OF THE CHILDREN

- **Children born to married parents are more likely to have been born with adequate birth weights, have low infant mortality, receive health insurance and immunizations and be in good health.** Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Indicators of Child Well-Being.
- **Children with married parents are less likely to be sexually active (32.3% with married parents compared to over 50% for all others) and half as likely to have a child out of wedlock (45.4% with married parents, 57.6% with divorced parents, over 60% for cohabiting and step families and 80.2% with never married mothers).** National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, Wave II, 1996.

- **Teens with married parents are half as likely to use marijuana than teens in divorced families. (19% with married parents, 29% with single mothers and 35.3% in divorced families).** National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, Wave I, 1995.
- **Teens with married parents are half as likely to use cocaine than teens from divorced or single parent families. (2.8% with married families, 5.2% in divorced families and 7.5% with single mothers).** National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, Wave II, 1996.

POSITIVE IMPACTS ON PARENTS

- **Mothers who are or who have ever been married are half as likely to be a victim of domestic violence than unmarried mothers.** US Department of Justice. National Crime Victimization Survey, 1999.
- **Married people report that 43.5% are very happy opposed to 21% of those divorced and 18.7% of those never married.** National Opinion Research Center, General Social Survey, 1998.
- **Divorced or separated people are twice as likely to attempt suicide.** Ronald C. Kessler, et al, "Prevalence of and Risk Factors for Lifetime Suicide Attempts in the National Co-morbidity Survey" Archives of General Psychiatry. Vol. 56, 1999.

Iowa Data on Children, Marriage and Family

- **There are 769,684 total families in Iowa.** Kids Count, 2000 Iowa Data, June 2003.
- **Of all families, there were 376,433 that included biological minor children.** Kids Count, 2000 Iowa Data, June 2003.
- **Of these families, 93,861 were single parent families with minor children.** Kids Count, 2000 Iowa Data, June 2003.
- **In 2001, there were 21,127 marriages.** Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics for Iowa, 2001 Provisional Data.
- **282,572 or 75% married families include children with at least one biological parent.** Kids Count, 2000 Iowa Data, June 2003.
- **In 2001, there were 9,542 divorces in Iowa.** Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics for Iowa, 2001 Provisional Data.
- **5,162 divorced families or 54% in 2001 had minor children living at home.** Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics for Iowa, 2001 Provisional Data.

Economic Data

- **There were 382,455 Iowa households with 720,127 minor children in 2000.** Kids Count, 2000 Iowa Data, June 2003.
- **74,957 or 11% of all children lived in poverty.** Kids Count, 2000 Iowa Data, June 2003.
- **39,728 or 50% of all poor Iowa children lived with their single mothers.** Kids Count, 2000 Iowa Data, June 2003.

- **The median income for Iowa married parents is \$55,946, \$20,453 for single mothers and \$28,788 for fathers.** Kids Count, Iowa 2000 Data, June 2003.

Babies

- **37,610 babies were born in 2001. Of those 28.7% or 10,824 were born to unmarried mothers.** Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics for Iowa, 2001 Provisional Data.
- **In 2001, 6.4% or 2,407 babies were born with low birth weight.** Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics for Iowa, 2001 Provisional Data.

Selected Information on Fatherhood

1. **96% of respondents in a national survey agreed that parents should share equally in the caretaking of children.** Life's Work: Generational Attitudes toward Work and Life Integration. Cambridge, MA: The Radcliffe Public Policy Center, 2000.
2. **When both parents are involved in the child's education e.g., attending school meetings, parent-teacher conferences, volunteering at school, class events, there is a higher likelihood that the child will receive high grades and enjoy school and reduce the likelihood that a grade will be repeated.** Nord, C.W., Brimhall, D. & West, J. Fathers' Involvement in Schools. U.S. Department of Education in "What Do Fathers Contribute to Children's Well Being" Child Trends Research Brief, 1997.
3. **Both parents supporting the child financially reduce risk factors associated with poverty. Poverty levels are reduced when both parents are present: single parent families have a poverty rate of 46% while two parent families have a rate of approximately 10%.** Map and Track: State Initiatives to Encourage Responsible Fatherhood. National Center for Children in Poverty, 1999.
4. **Seventy-one per cent of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.** US Dept. of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health. Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization, quoting from a recent study by Men Against Domestic Violence, 1993.
5. **The likelihood that a young male will engage in criminal activity doubles if he is raised without a father and triples if he lives in a neighborhood with a high concentration of single-parent families.** M. Anne and June O'Neill. Underclass Behaviors in the United States: Measurement and Analysis of Determinants. City University of New York, Baruch College, 1993.
6. **Seventy-five percent of all adolescents in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes.** Dept. of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. Survey on Child Health, 1993.
7. **Three out of four teenage suicides occur in households where a parent has been absent. Ninety per cent of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes.** Elshstain, Jean Bethke. "Family Matters: The Plight of America's Children." The Christian Century, July 1993. Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization, quoting from a recent study by Men Against Domestic Violence.

8. **Father-child interaction has been shown to promote a child's physical well-being, perceptual abilities, and competency for relatedness with others, even at a young age.** Krampe, E.M. and P.D. Fairweather. "Father Presence and Family Formation: A Theoretical Reformation." *Journal of Family Issues* 14.4 (December 1993): 572- 591.
9. **"In a study of fathers' interaction with their children in intact two-parent families, nearly 90% of the fathers surveyed said that being a father is the most fulfilling role a man can have."** Yeung, W Jean, et al. "Children's Time with Fathers in Intact Families." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Chicago, IL, August 2000.